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Cryptozoological news (37)

Once more the ameranthropoid
(available
text by Michel
on my web site)
Raynal

No less than four authors (three Venezuelians and one American) have just published a long article about the ameranthropoid in a Swiss scientific magazine, the Bulletin de la Société Vaudoise des Sciences Naturelles of September 1999.

Venezuela Guyana
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In 1920, while on mission in southern Venezuela, Swiss geologist François de Loys shot a great primate looking like an ape: according to de Loys, it was 1.57 m (more than 5 feet) high, it had 32 teeth and above all it had no tail. The animal was photographed on a box (figure 1).

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Figure 1: the ameranthropoid, photographed by François de Loys (from Montandon 1929).

In 1929, Swiss ethnologist George Montadon described this animal as a new species of an anthropoid ape under the name of Ameranthropoides loysi (Montandon 1929). This lead to an endless controversy lasting nowadays.

The four authors of the article of the Swiss society gathered interesting data on François de Loys's biography, from which they conclude in their "final considerations":

"It appears that François de Loys was a man of science, serious and responsible [...]. It seems unlikely that such a man could make the forgery of the ape only for the renown. [...] There is no sufficient reasons to claim that de Loys did not tell the truth, particularly when you have under your eyes an irrefutable document, an original photograph taken at a time when photographic trucage and image manipulation by computers did not exist." (Viloria et al. 1999)

In fact the four co-authors do not add any new zoological element to the controversy, and their conclusion is questionable.

Firstly, photographic trucage does exist since Méliès, not to mention Nadar! Incidentally, instead of the above "original photograph" (figure 1), the four authors could not help themselves to publish a photograph centered on the monkey, giving the impression of a very large primate ! Then, with regards to the "ape" itself, research by prominent mammalogists and primatologists demonstrate that it is without any doubt an Ateles belzebuth, or spider monkey.

Also, to state that the photograph is an "irrefutable document " is at the very least somewhat bold : as many other people before him, Guido Olivieri (1999) emphasizes that the tail may be hidden behind the body: why on earth did de Loys photograph the animal from such an ambiguous angle ? Furthermore, the lack of any independant refrence mark giving the scale forbides to verify the size of the creature why nobody is present on the photograph, which would have allowed to confirm the alleged height?

Finally, why François de Loys did not mention such a spectacular incident in his writings, waiting for his meeting with Montandon in 1929 (hence, 9 years later) to reveal this stupefying story?

One year ago, Pierre Centlivres and Isabelle Girod published another article about the ameranthropoid in the magazine of ethnology Gradhiva, and they come to a completely different conclusion it his a hoax made by George Montandon, on the base of his racist theories on the

origin of man. Having found the famous photograph while studying de Loys's documents on Motilones Indians, Montandon saw in it the "missing link" between South-American monkeys and Indians, which in his mind was a proof of his sheer theory known as ologenism (Centlivres et Girod 1998).

This hypothesis was already proposed by Loren Coleman et Michel Raynal (1996, 1997), two researchers who can hardly be suspected of an anti-cryptozoological bias.

More details on the French page.

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